

QA 23 – Infant Obesity as Predictor of Adult Obesity

QUESTION:

An infant girl was born at 41 and 5/7 weeks, weighing 8lbs 12oz to a normal weight 29 year old woman. At 4 months, the infant is 25 and 1/4" and 19lbs 10oz. Everything I've read says there is a little association between infant obesity and adult obesity. I have not seen any interventions proposed. Mom is planning to wean to Enfamil. We will monitor monthly, perhaps delay solids a little and encourage being active (not in the swing). Infant is going to start at Montessori next week for 10 hrs a day. Any insight on infant obesity?

ANSWER:

Infant weight status or rate of weight gain in the first year of life is not predictive of overweight/obesity in older children and adults. However, overweight in children as young as 1-3 years of age can be predictive of overweight in pre-adolescence. Generally, the older the overweight child, the higher is the risk of overweight or obesity in adolescence and adulthood.

This infant has slightly more than doubled her birthweight by 4 months of age, and her overall rate of weight gain (37-38 grams per day) is at the high end of the typical rate of weight gain. Weight for age and weight for length are above the 95th percentile, but that also reflects high birthweight.

There is no evidence that type of feeding (breast or formula) or age of introduction of solids make a difference in eventual weight status. Formula-fed infants are usually heavier than breast-fed initially, but no difference is noted by school-age. However, continuation of breast-feeding and adding solids gradually when developmentally-appropriate are appropriate infant feeding practices. Movement and activity will be key factors in controlling rate of weight gain.

Regular monitoring of growth is appropriate in these cases, as well as general anticipatory guidance regarding feeding practices. Nutrition counseling should avoid causing any parental anxiety about overweight during infancy or concern about putting the baby "on a diet".

References:

- 1) Fomon, SJ: Nutrition of Normal Infants, chap. 4, Mosby, 1993.
- 2) Trahms, CM, and Pipes, PL: Nutrition in Infancy and Childhood, 6th ed., chapters 1 and 10, WCB/McGraw Hill, 1997.
- 3) Satter, E: How to Get Your Kid to Eat. .But not too Much, Bull Publishing, 1987.